

The Calm Before the Storm by [ideaspastmidnight](#)

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Summary:

Billy doesn't have a lot of good days. A frantic call from Max makes him think this won't be one of them. Maybe it'll surprise him.

The Calm Before the Storm

Author's Note:

- For [goblinhoodies](#).

This is a present for the platonic love of my life, Syd. I know you've been feeling not great the past couple of days and I hope this makes you smile.

My first time writing for stranger things and this ot3, be kind please.

Billy has good days and bad days. Some are worse or better than others, but a lot of the time he has no idea which direction it's going to go. Mostly, he just tries to roll with the punches.

Sometimes having Jonathan and Steve around helps, sometimes it doesn't. Most of the time just getting in his car and blaring some AC/DC or Bon Jovi while he drives way too fast is enough to clear his head. He likes it when one or both of his boyfriends tag along, Jonathan humming along while he holds Billy's hand and traces shapes on his palm or Steve singing at the top of his lungs, dancing around as much as he's able from the backseat. They always manage to make Billy crack a smile, at the very least.

Unfortunately, some days nothing helps. Usually he can focus on his job easily enough - he's a barista, it's not always easy but it's not hard, either. And even when he's not at work it's easy enough to lose himself in music or working on his car, or even with Steve and Jonathan if they're within reach.

Some days he wakes up and just feels wrong. He can push it away most of the time, ignore it for awhile, but it always comes back, one way or another. Sometimes it's bursts of anger or just a feeling of *wrongness* that never quite goes away. And sometimes he can't even make himself get out of bed.

It's easier to deal with when you have partners who get it, who *understand* , but not always. They help as much as they can, but

there's only so much you can do. Luckily, both Jonathan and Steve understand that. Hell, they both go through it, too. Trauma - the gift that keeps on giving.

Billy wakes up slow, tired still even after nearly ten hours of sleep. He's always restless around his birthday, even though he does enjoy summer more than any other season. He'll take any excuse to take his shirt off, not that he really needs one; he doesn't hear Steve or Jonathan complaining.

Steve is still asleep, normally perfect hair a tousled mess. Jonathan is awake, blinking blearily up at Billy from where he lays against Steve's chest. He smiles as Billy's gaze meets his, a smile reserved just for the three of them. It's slow, soft, almost tender.

He'd never admit it, but to Billy it feels like a gift. Jonathan is so reserved, so aware of how people view him, that he rarely lets people get close enough to really know him. He pushed both Billy and Steve away in the beginning, but Steve is almost stupidly optimistic when he wants to be and Billy has never really been able to take no for an answer. He's glad they didn't give up. He thinks Jonathan is, too.

"Hey," Jonathan breathes as he reaches up to push a wayward curl out of Billy's eyes. "Morning."

Billy can't stop a smile forming on his lips as he catches Jonathan's hand, pressing a kiss to his palm. "Mornin'."

Jonathan smiles back, nearly beaming. Billy can practically feel the affection radiating off him. After living with someone who despised his very existence it's more than a little nice to feel so loved. He never would have thought he could have something like this. Not in a million years.

Steve stirs behind Jonathan, groaning as he seems to not want to accept the fact that he's awake. Billy snorts and rolls his eyes. He can relate. "Mornin', sunshine."

Steve groans even louder and tries to bury his face in Jonathan's shoulder blade. He might get away with it, too, if not for Shadow. She's Jonathan's cat, technically, a black ball of fluff that hates just

about everyone. She's never done more than tolerate Jonathan, really, and she outright hates Steve. For some reason Billy is her favorite. He finds it fucking hilarious.

Shadow never fails to realize when her boys, specifically Billy, are awake. She steps on Steve's face, earning a "fucking favoritism" for her trouble. Jonathan tries to stifle a laugh and promptly gets a face full of tail. The look on his face is enough to make Billy laugh, but when she settles herself on his chest and starts purring he absolutely loses it.

Unfortunately, neither Steve or Jonathan really find it all that funny. Somehow that doesn't help Billy to stop laughing. If anything, that only makes it worse.

Steve groans again and shoves his head under a pillow when he realizes that Shadow isn't going to take mercy on him and show him any semblance of affection. No matter how many times she ignores him he keeps trying. Billy has to admire his dedication.

Jonathan huffs out a small laugh and rolls his eyes as he sits up, half-heartedly attempting to get Steve to come out from his hiding spot. He's long since accepted that Shadow loves one man and one man only and it's not him. Maybe he doesn't mind as much because he loves the same man. Maybe Billy is just getting sappy. Fuck if he knows.

It takes them longer than it should to actually get out of bed and get dressed. It's partly Shadow's fault, annoyed at not being given Billy's full attention and doing anything she possibly can to get it back. It's also partly Billy's fault, though, because as soon as they're all vertical Billy is pulling his boyfriends close and stealing kisses. They don't seem to mind; if anything, it helps wake Steve up and Jonathan is never one to turn down affection.

Steve has just barely managed to get jeans on and is quickly losing a fight with a shirt that might have once belonged to Billy when Billy's phone rings. He frowns and glances at the time. It's only half past ten and he can't think of anyone who would be calling him that early. No one good, at least.

Jonathan leans on Billy's shoulder for a moment, liking realizing the same thing Billy had before he moves to rescue Steve from his shirt. Good thing, too, Billy thinks absent-mindedly as he answers the phone, because it doesn't look like Steve is going to win.

Unfortunately for him, the voice on the other end of the line is the last one he wants to hear. He can quickly feel his good morning twisting into something bad.

At first, all he can hear is yelling. Then something gets thrown and it sounds like glass shattering. He feels his blood turn to ice and if the suddenly worried looks he's getting mean anything he's likely gone pale.

He pulls the phone away from his ear and looks down at the name.

Max.

Their relationship has gotten a lot better since he graduated high school and moved out of Neil's house, but he knows she wouldn't call him for no reason. He also knows she wouldn't make him face Neil if she didn't think her life was in danger.

He's afraid to speak, the words stuck in his throat. What if he says the wrong thing? Fuck, Neil might not even know that Max called anyone. What if he says something and makes it worse? Billy hadn't thought Max was in danger from the bastard, but now he can't help but wonder if he was wrong. God, he hopes he wasn't wrong.

Before he can decide whether or not to say anything he hears Max whisper " *hurry* " right before she hangs up.

Billy is all too familiar with adrenaline and how it feels to be in a situation where you have to choose fight or flight. He's been in nearly the same situation he can imagine Max is in too many times. Jonathan and Steve have been, too, but he's not about to make them face his asshole father with him. The only problem is he doesn't think they're going to give him much of a choice.

He starts to open his mouth, but before he can even get a word out Jonathan is stepping close and giving him a steely look. "Don't.

We're coming."

When he glances back at Steve his arms are crossed over his chest and his eyes are more serious than Billy has seen them in years. "Sorry, Hargrove. You're stuck with us."

Any other time he might think it was hot, and even tease them about it, but he's too freaked out to do anything other than appreciate the support. He sighs and just about manages a nod before Jonathan is grabbing the car keys and Steve is tangling their fingers together to pull him out the door.

They don't live far from Billy's old house. Closer to Joyce, the one good parent any of them really have, but still close enough to get there quickly in case they ever needed to. Billy has never been more grateful for that than he is now. As soon as they're in the car Jonathan is calling his mom, quickly explaining the situation. It would be enough just to have her support, but it definitely helps that she's dating the sheriff.

Joyce gets there at almost the exact time they do and if Billy wasn't so worried about Max he might ask just how many laws she broke. Not that he thought she would tell him.

Billy approaches the house slowly, hesitantly, like someone marching towards a death squad. Without his permission his feet slow to a stop, leaving him frozen. He swears under his breath and wishes he was less of a coward.

He knows that Joyce - or even Jonathan or Steve - would step up and be the one to deal with Neil, but Billy can't let them. His dad has always been the monster that haunts his nightmares and he was always going to have to face him. He can't put it off any longer.

He hears yelling before he even reaches the door. He tenses, trying to will his fight or flight instinct to chill the fuck out. He can't afford to give in to either one until he knows Max is safe. If Neil laid a hand on her he's going to have to worry about a lot more than going to prison. Max's partner, for one. El doesn't play around when it comes to the people they care about.

He bangs on the door, loud enough to interrupt whatever the hell is going on inside the house. He only hopes he's not too late.

Neil sneers when he opens the door, grinning with too many teeth. Billy has to suppress a shudder. It's been at least a year since he's even seen his dad and even longer since he lived with him. Time hasn't done a lot to erase the memories. "The fuck you doin' here?"

"Where's Max?" He speaks slowly, hoping to hear her from inside the house, but Neil is too close. He can't think.

Before Neil can say another word Joyce comes to stand at Billy's side, staring Neil Hargrove down like no one else could. She doesn't say a word, but she doesn't have to. She's long since made it clear she won't stand for domestic or child abuse and those rumors, those stories about her and her ex-husband, have definitely made it back to Neil.

He steps aside a lot quicker than Billy expected him to, if he even did at all. It becomes all too clear why as soon as Billy steps foot inside the doorway.

Neil grabs his arm faster than anyone can stop him, jerking him into the house and slamming him into the closest wall. Billy winces, ignoring the pain that lances through his spine. He can't say he didn't expect something like this. He hoped it wouldn't happen, but well. He knows his dad.

He hears someone yell something, but with all his focus on Neil he can't make out who it is or what they might have said. It's less important than the hand moving towards his throat. A lifetime of not being able to fight back keeps him from reacting for what feels like the longest second of his life.

"Billy!" Steve's voice, far enough away that someone must be restraining him, breaks through the fear and anxiety that had closed in over him when Neil first touched him.

Without letting himself think about it too much he tilts his chin down, grabs Neil's wrist and shoves, chest heaving as air suddenly rushes back into his lungs. He winces as he touches what will no

doubt be impressive bruises on his throat.

Before Neil can do any more than glare in his son's direction Joyce is stepping in between them. He can't see the look on her face, but from the way she's standing and the way Neil seems to deflate he can imagine it's less than impressed.

"Go on, honey." She says without turning around, clearly directing the comment to Billy. "Find your sister."

He bites back the automatic response of "step-sister", knowing it's a lot less true than it used to be. He and Max may not be best friends, but he does genuinely care about her and he thinks she feels the same.

He glances at Steve, who is in fact being held back by Jonathan. Not everyone would be able to tell he's upset, but to Billy it's obvious. He's tense, looking like he couldn't move even if he wanted to and not just because Jonathan is keeping him in place; they all have father related trauma and as hard as this is for Billy it's worse for Steve because he hates to see people he loves in pain. Jonathan offers a wry smile, and relaxes his grip on their boyfriend. They both know Steve won't do anything as long as Billy isn't in danger.

Finding Max is easy enough. She's sitting on the floor in the living room, looking shell shocked. Her face is bruised and there's blood on her lips.

Billy is familiar with anger, with the way rage boils his blood. Seeing Max hurt the way he had been so many times makes him angrier than he has been in a long time. But she called him, she asked for *his* help. He can't let it take over the way he used to.

He gets as close as he thinks he should, not sure how she'll react just yet and crouches. "Max?"

She doesn't respond at first, not even blinking to indicate she heard him. He sighs and braces himself to be punched as he reaches out and gently touches her wrist. Her whole body jerks, gaze darting around frantically before it lands on him. He's not sure she actually realizes who he is at first, but slowly recognition comes to her. "Billy?"

"Hey, shitbird," he says more fondly than he ever has before. What can he say? She's grown on him.

She laughs, shaking her head and rolling her eyes. "You came."

He wants to be annoyed at the disbelief in her voice, but he gets it. There's a lot of pain between them and no matter how much time passes it's still going to be there. He's been trying to repair some of the damage he caused, but it'll take time. He hopes being here for her will help her begin to trust him.

"Of course." He lets himself sound sincere, no matter how much he wants to play it off. He's serious and he needs her to know that. "No where else I would rather be."

She studies him for a long moment, those blue eyes of hers seeing far more than they should. He doesn't know what she sees when she looks at him and he isn't sure he wants to know. "Thank you."

Billy glances behind him as he hears a car door shut and a deep voice saying something he can't make out. It sounds like Hopper, probably El too, but they're much quieter. Max must think so too, if the way her face lights up is any indication.

"Did you think they wouldn't come?" He teases, grinning. "You know they're head over heels for you."

Max rolls her eyes, shoving his shoulder and almost making him lose his balance, but she's smiling so at least he knows she isn't mad. "Says the guy with two boyfriends."

"Two boyfriends who are ready to kick Neil's ass for you."

Max's smile fades, expression turning serious and maybe a little shocked. "They're here too?"

"They wouldn't let me come alone." He rolls his eyes, trying to play off the importance. But he and Max both know what it means that they came with him. "Overprotective assholes."

"Good." She smiles and gives him a look of genuine affection. "I'm glad you have them."

Billy's immediate response is to brush her off and change the subject - or at least it would have been, a couple years ago. Now, though, he can't help but agree with her. He knows how lucky he is.

Before they can do or say anything else Steve pokes his head into the room and gives Billy a meaningful look. He doesn't say anything, but Billy knows him well enough to know he's giving them a heads up that they don't have much time left. Billy nods and turns back to Max. "Time to go."

Max sighs and leans back on her hands. "Go where? I'm not eighteen yet. I can't just *leave*."

He can almost feel the desperation in her voice, the desire to run away and never come back. He knows she wouldn't do it, at least not for good. She has too many people who would miss her if she disappeared.

He reaches out and puts his hand on her knee to get her attention. It works, even though there's a hesitation, a mask she's trying to keep in place to hide how she really feels. "Stay with me." He glances back at Steve, who's still close enough to hear, who would agree with what Billy's about to say. "Stay with us. We want you there."

Max stares at him for a long time, longer than Billy is sure they have. "You don't mean that."

There's fear in her voice, fear that Billy is intimately familiar with. The fear of never being enough, of always being the one left behind. Billy hates that she has to feel it, too.

Everything in him wants to brush it off or make a joke and move on, but he forces himself to meet her gaze and be as serious as he knows how to be. "I do." He pauses, tries to gather the words. "I promise. We want you."

Billy's only seen Max cry a handful of times and most of those were because she was angry. He's never seen her cry because she was happy.

She throws herself at him, wrapping him up in as much of a hug as

she can. This time he does lose his balance but he doesn't care. Max is safe. She's safe and *happy* . It's more than he ever could have asked for.

Steve gives Billy a knowing look, a smug smirk on his face, when Billy and Max finally join them in the front yard. There will be teasing later, but more than that, Billy knows that Steve is proud of him. Jonathan, too, but he's always claimed to know that Billy would step up and be there if Max needed him to, even when he himself wasn't sure.

Neil is in handcuffs, looking more pissed off than Billy thinks he has ever seen him. He tenses, but before he can get too worked up about it Hopper comes up and squeezes his shoulder. The look on his face, determined and protective, tells Billy all he needs to know. Max will stay safe, no matter what it takes.

She doesn't stay at his side for long, because as soon as she sees El she's gone. They collide in a hug that looks painful and almost immediately slide to the ground. They're smiling and holding onto each other, looking like they never want to let go.

Billy glances back at Hopper, who looks like he's sucking on a lemon, but he meets Billy's gaze and rolls his eyes. "Teenagers."

Billy laughs and shakes his head. " *Teenagers* . "

Hopper walks off, presumably to talk to Joyce or call for backup. Billy can't really say he cares. Not when he spots his boyfriends walking towards him.

Anxiety spikes in his chest for a second as he tries to figure out how to tell them he invited his sister to stay with them. Before he can do more than start to panic Steve is wrapping his arms around Billy's neck and slotting their mouths together. It's practically a reflex to kiss back, but he doesn't start to relax until he feels Jonathan settle against his back and wrap him up in a hug.

Steve pulls back and grins. "You really thought we'd be mad?"

Billy shrugs and tries to avoid the knowing look in his boyfriend's

eyes. “Maybe.”

Jonathan snorts and drops his arms away from where they had been wrapped around Billy’s stomach. He makes a face at the loss of contact, but before he can say anything Jonathan is kissing his cheek and pulling Billy’s arm around his shoulders. “Max is family.” He smiles when Billy finally meets his gaze. “C’mon babe, you know my mom. We can never have enough family.”

Steve laughs from where he’s leaning against Billy’s other side. “Man, I swear Joyce would adopt all the wayward kids in this town if she could.”

“Don’t let her hear you say that. She’ll take it as a challenge.”

Billy huffs out a laugh and shakes his head fondly. He looks over at Max just to see her already watching him. She smiles and mouths “gay” before sticking her tongue out at him. He rolls his eyes and flips her off.

He never thought this would be where he ended up, but there’s nowhere else he would rather be.